King of Disappearing Nowhere

(In which characters that are clearly not Kamala Harris or Donald Trump or Benn Jordan explore a possibility of future. The Prophet Obblonge appears as itself.)

An email - a summons. My presence is more than requested, for once. A stipend to get me to San Francisco by a certain date for a speaking engagement. The senders identify themselves only by the name of their organization, something prestigious in tone and mysterious - the first few pages of a comic book. The PayPal transfer is real and I have nothing else scheduled. This kind of opportunity is exactly the sort that fits in well with my plan to get exposed to a wider audience, thus pushing the issues most important to me. I calculate that if I leave immediately by bus and there are minimal delays, I can avoid taking a flight, which I am loathe to do. Boarding at the venue, some sort of think tank with a website espousing nothing I am in disagreeance with, is reserved. I score some drugs to keep me alert with the extra funds saved from avoiding airports and wait at the bus stop, which here in San Antonio is at the newly renovated carcass of the Pearl Brewery.

It is nearly ten hours until departure, but the scene at the apartment I've been crashing at is the epitome of uncool. My benefactor went to jail covering for a female he was interested in, taking the rap for an empty baggie with a film of powdery residue. That was in October. He is a disabled veteran of the US Army demolitions experts and his apartment was covered under his benefits, which ceased as soon as he was incarcerated. His car and finances were left in the care of the couple also residing with us, whose brilliant plan turns out to have been to defraud the US government for as long as possible, with me as the scapegoat should things go less than ideal. They have, of course. Which had left me as the only one to be burdened with nowhere to go at any day upcoming - they both having living parents and still with the keys to a car and an account with a positive balance. Every day I heard a different invented hard luck story sprinkled with equally imagined successes - all covering up the truth, that his online gambling addiction using my friend's money and constant thefts from a Favorite DashDoor job using my identity were what was keeping the lights on and food in the refrigerator,

besides the church across the highway's food pantry I have walked back and forth to and from. Dishonesty is truly the worst sin. Such spoiled, rotten children that got away with abysmal behavior their whole lives, hurting others without regard. A scene I am most buoyed to be leaving.

It takes less than fifteen minutes to pack everything I own into my one backpack and guitar bag. The site of the Pearl is now divided into upscale restaurants and boutiques, a few art studios in the industrial spaces above in the weathered brick edifices. There is a multi-level parking garage in view of the street where the bus transfers passengers, and my plan is to keep moving while I drink a six-pack of cheap domestic tallboys until finally sitting outdoors at a table and eating an appetizer, slowly. I walk to the destination, which takes hours in itself. My plan works as intended, and I am aboard on time, having paid an extra seven dollars for the panoramic view seats in front across from the driver. Plenty of room for my two bags and me. The next stop is Austin, north of San Antonio. Fishbone's Racist Piece of Shit soothes through my Sennheiser HD560S headphones, the most expensive item I own by far, and which I recorded, mixed, and mastered five albums with. No one is even close to sitting nearby. This will prove to be the case all the way to California. There wasn't anyone to tell I was leaving, not that they would have cared.

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The Institute sends a driver out to pick me up from the departure point in San Francisco. I have tried my best to pay attention to the scenery passing by, and failed miserably, passing into slobbering slumber almost every time the wheels start turning. If wasn't for the pilots of each craft kicking me, I'd been left behind somewhere.

The impression in my head of my destination is something like the scene of UC Berkeley, with its alumni including Terence McKenna. The car that picks me up is a fully electric Fiat with a grey bearded man wearing sunglasses behind the wheel. He is listening to a live taped show of the Grateful Dead, which he informs me he

attended. He is wearing a loud plaid blazer that would make a used car salesperson pale, open to a T-shirt with the ubiquitous Steal Your Face logo. I tell him I had one that matched it for so long the threads gave out, but never the screen print. We both give an amen to the secrets of GD merchandising before he tells me how excited he is to meet me and how awesome it is going to be to get a chance to witness a live performance. I am flattered, but more confused, though I don't let on to that. Leaning the seat back, I softly mumble the words along with the soundtrack while imagining what Blumhouse horror flick I am being hand carried into.

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Sure enough, our destination is a concrete artwork unto itself, resembling a giant tortoise tomb emerging from the side of a sheer cliff. I have been forewarned that as a policy the Institute only employs heating when temperatures are near freezing. This suits me fine, I reply, meaning it. My leather jacket rarely got used in Texas, as sweating in cold weather is something only the lowest rungs on the intelligence ladder partake in.

My timing is precise enough. There is two hours before I am set to begin whatever it is I am expected to do when my glimmering mirage of an escort shows me the lodging I will have use of for the next few days. It is a small studio apartment, just as big as some I have rented monthly on lease, but with huge windows facing the Pacific Ocean, which I have never witnessed. A comfortable queen size foam mattress sits frameless on the floor, covered with heavy blankets bearing the Institute's logo - a silhouette of an octopus holding a mystical looking symbol in its tentacles. Loading my drugs into a glass pipe and fumbling for a torch, I try to decide if the design comes from a Bond film, or a concert t-shirt, or....no. I am still very much in the first half hour of a Blumhouse production - a high budget one at that.

There is a snack tray atop a small stainless steel refrigerator with packaged foods that can only be described as organic and several micro and macrodose zipper

sealed packets of mushrooms from Mama Dose. I crunch these down between hits while pacing back and forth in front of the impressive view. There is no land visible, only ocean roiling under a sunset growing steadily more majestic. Before long, a knock at the door informs me it is showtime. My host's blazer is alive and laser tentacled.

Much to my shock, the quarters next to mine have been filled with Jenn Borden and their spouse, who both are very cordial in their unnecessary introductions. Tomorrow's performance or whatever we're doing belongs to them. The four of us loudly clamor through a cavernous echoing passageway that opens to an amphitheater matching that Pink Floyd recorded their film at Pompeii. The semicircular pews are full, with patrons spaced comfortably and clad in coats. Open flames excite the platters of many Olympic styled brass dishes on stilts. I don't see well, and most of the assembled crowd is blurry.

Taking center stage with a corded dynamic microphone, there is one person who I can see, as she is sitting much closer than the rest - almost on the dais of the stage itself. It is the woman I campaigned tirelessly for during the last nationwide election, our former vice president. Alone at a tiny table which is really only large enough to hold a bottle of liquor, pale green in color and of no design I've seen on store shelves.

Not having any plan to begin with and not really having been asked specifically to do anything to collect the rest of the payment alluded to, I open my mouth and keep moving it. I decide to play an unannounced drinking game with the pretty girl sitting just right of center stage. Every time she fills her ornate pewter magician's goblet, I change narrative with a sound imitating a tape cassette being stretched. Four hours later my voice gives out.

I don't remember leaving the stage or ending the performance, nor traversing the corridor large enough to drive armored personnel carriers through. The next thing I am cognizant of is watching the wine-dark sea from the windows of the boarding room, being passed the singular bottle which I am relieved to find is not absinthe. Absinthe is on the same list as kombucha that warns the reader of the most disgusting substances one can possibly ingest. The bottle is more than half empty and its owner and I are the only ones present.

"Tell me the story you said you had written involving me as a character."

The voice is detached from direction.

So, I do. A scene from the body of a tale. Myself as who I am, the Red Cloud, an alien to this hell. Her a being represented by the tarot card Death. Something that brings about drastic change. Something that frightens most. Something I find enchanting and charming, being as it is that the status quo of this hell is unbearable to. In the full moonlight streaming in the huge plate glass her cheekbones and forehead - then, most of her face - is colored the dull hue of skeletons with eyes perfect black opals entombing reflected waves. Neither of us have bothered to engage any lightsource interior, the radiant sun's reflected glow bathing the entire space with enough luminosity to finish a crossword by.

"You won the election. The worshippers of Satan disqualified the votes of women who had registered under their maiden names after being married. It is something more than one goddess has caught in cauldrons of turmoil. My goddess, Eris, has sensed an imposition of order which must be made balanced with impending, healing chaos. Bureaucracy works for neither. At least that is in the favor of the damned souls that populate this awful place."

Her visage is pure bone now, though pliant, like a latex mask. Eyes too large. It is impossible to read expression. I find it exquisite and can't help staring. There is no way to tell if this reaper finds this offensive. It is still as death.

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The thieving imposter sees well its numbered days. Using funds ill-begotten it, as usual, believes the pitches made on golf courses. Beholds the video footage taken from nothing but flattering angles. It knows that no one knows better than he. Arranges to purchase an independent nation and make it his own - Tuvalu. The few residents take leave, not wanting to be ruled by a king, and being well compensated as they were. Quickly a palace is constructed, where in the night, so to speak, he installs himself.

The military base never gets more than half a foundation. Supplies, which are necessary, as there are no resources to speak of for his taste on the island, never make it through international waters.

Seawater laps at the gates of his gilded castle.

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Sharks patrol these waters

Sharks patrol these waters

Don't let your fingers dangle in the water

And don't you worry about the dayglow orange life preserver

It won't save you

It won't save you

Swim like a motherfucker

Swim!

- Morphine

Sharks

Yes album